The Rise of Putin Doctrine in Russian Foreign Policy: Implications for the United States

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Abstract

Exploring Russia's unique history illustrates that the Putin doctrine is not a novel phenomenon as described by several political analysts across the globe, but an entangled resurrection of 'trends and patterns' from various timelines of Russian history. There are a number of factors that have contributed to Putin's rule including the discourse of an exceptional Eurasian Civilization that has survived to this day. A thousand-year historical review of Russia demonstrates its deeply inculcated autocratic and elite culture. On this basis, parallels can be drawn between Putin and Russian leaders of the past for their mode of governance and their fear of the West. Changing world orders and historical setbacks have also played a role in forging identities and leaders, and Putin is also a product of these circumstances. Contrary to the popular belief that Putin has made Russia adopt an expansionist strategy, this article stresses on the role of historical traditions and values. In addition, it highlights how the increase in Russia's material strength may challenge the US-dominated world order.

Keywords: Putinism, exceptionalism, civilization, autocracy, oligarchs, history, foreign policy, implications.

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Introduction

According to social constructivism, the existence of the social world around us is deeply grounded in ideas. Ideas are the most resilient parasites. Once a fully developed idea takes hold of the brain, it is impossible to eliminate it (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). Arguably, ideas do not exist in a vacuum; rather pre-existing ideas and circumstances guide the inception of a new idea. Likewise, the formation of modern nationalism has engendered the concept of a national identity, premised on the notion that individuals sharing commonalities are entitled to rights and bear obligations towards each other (Liu and Turner, 2018). The creation of the modern nation-state has been based on the idea of amalgamating people of a common national identity (Hoffmann 1966).

It is noted that national identity functions as a primary link between both the individual and the society and the domestic and the external world (Prizel and Dunlop 1998). The world of ideas varies from individuals to a social group and equips people with a sense of purpose and uniqueness. The modern nation-state comprises two fundamental components: the nation-state system itself and the national identity of those residing within its territorial boundaries (Zheng 2004). These identities are discursively constructed by those with social influence, by employing strategies that correspond to their perspectives (Wodak 2009). They are shaped in a way that may lead a nation to war or to work towards the greater good.

In the contemporary history, Russian President Vladimir Putin revitalized the Russian national identity in such an aggressive way that led his country to war with the whole non-conforming neighborhood. In order to accomplish this, Putin utilized a combination of strident anti-Western rhetoric with traditional nationalist and Russian Orthodox religious themes and symbols (Geifman and Teper 2014). Propagation of national glorification by the Kremlin can rightly be termed 'Putinism', which has both domestic and international determinants and effects. Contrary to the popular belief in the West that Russia's aggressive foreign policy and the war in Ukraine are

geostrategic, this paper argues that the former are, in fact, more ideational, having roots in the Russian history and ideology of exceptionalism and civilizational superiority. In what follows, we introduce Putinism by grounding it in Russian history followed by a description of an exceptional Russian identity, meeting its high point of civilizational identity in the recent past. We then trace Putinism in practice by exploring its 'historical parallels' to the present behavior of Russia as a revisionist state striving for a changing world order under Putin's discourse of 'the great Russia'. The last part of this article offers implications of Putinism for the United States.

1. Situating Putinism in Russian History

There have always been elements of Putinism, i.e., civilizational exceptionalism, autocracy, slavophilia, aristocracy, and euroscepticism in the reign of all the previous Russian rulers. Throughout its history, Russia has remained a dichotomous society, characterized by the coexistence of two distinct cultures—the elite and the rest. Powerful elites have long maintained a stance against the Westernization of Russia, attributing it to the absence of social enlightenment (Lukin, 2003). To prevent the population from going into the sphere of western influence, power elites in every era have ruled Russia with an iron fist. Even Russian leaders with a pro-Western orientation, such as Catherine II (1762-1796) and Alexander I (1801-1825), frequently rationalized their reluctance to implement profound reforms and establish institutions inspired by Western ideals by citing the purported lack of education, culture, and readiness for excessive freedom among the Russian people as opposed to their European counterparts (Lukin 2003).

Arguably, seven decades of Bolshevism were in fact a brief interlude amid a millennium of harsh despotism, secretive governance, lack of individual and property rights, and imperialistic foreign policy. Not only Stalin and Lenin but the west-inspired Czars like Peter the Great (1681-1725), Catherine-II (1762-1796) and Alexander-I (1801-1825) were all too autocratic by nature (Engelstein 2011). Prior to Russia's return to authoritarianism under Putin, the Gorbachev and

Yeltsin eras were a short interregnum of reformism. Russia began a new approach in the 2000s during Putin's first presidential term as soon as it had left behind the chaotic and economically disastrous Boris Yeltsin period in the 1990s. Even this brief shift from authoritarianism and expansionism was programmed within the genetic code of Russia. These years along with Putin's first term as president was a time of strength concentration. Putin's Russia was 'concentrating' its forces, imitating the strategy used by Imperial Russia after it was routed in the Crimean War of 1856. The historical statement, which was sent in a letter to foreign countries by the then foreign minister Prince Gorchakov, simply summarizes this tactic as *"La Russie ne bouge pas; elle se recueille"* means Russia is not furious; it is concentrating (Koffler 2021, 52). One political scientist termed it the "terminator" doctrine: "I'll be back" (Kanet 2011, 149).

Russia's interests in its neighborhood have always been the same as have been its methods to extract those interests. All that changed was the front men who were suspicious of the outside world. For a long historical period, Russia's interests, and those of its *glavnyi protivnik* (principal adversary) were at odds. Throughout the rule of Tsars, communist general secretaries, and post-Soviet presidents, the dialectical viewpoint and distrust towards the outside world remained extraordinarily enduring. The *glavnyi protivnik*, however, was not static, though the distrust continued. There was a time when Mongols were considered a chief adversary, and contemporary political analysts believe that *"glavnyi protivnik to Russia is the CIA"* (Staar and Tacosa 2004, 39). This constant distrust of the outside world and the unending desire for autocracy can best be phrased as 'same beliefs, different minds'.

Likewise, the autocratic behavior that we witness in Putin's era is not unknown to Russia. Russia's population has been under despotic domination for centuries. Ivan the Terrible (1547-1584), Peter the Great (1682-1725), Catherine the Great (1762-1796), Alexander-I (1801-1825), Nicholas-I (1825-1855), Alexander-III (1881-1894), Nicholas-II (1894-1917), Lenin (1917-24) and Stalin (1924-1953) were all the most despotic

leaders of Russian history (Ruud 2009). Alexander- III (1881-94) succeeded his father, Alexander- II (1855-1881), and immediately halted all reforms in Russia. Alexander-III (1881-1894), like his grandfather Nicholas- I (1825-1855), adhered to the ideals of autocracy, a type of administration in which he held absolute authority. Individuals were deemed threatening if they challenged the supreme authority of the czar; practiced a religion other than the Russian Orthodox Church; or spoke a language that was not Russian.

Czars' autocratic rule eradicated revolutionaries and employed severe measures to execute them. For example, Alexander- III (1881-1894) established rigorous censorship regulations on all printed and written publications, including private communication. His secret police kept a close eye on both secondary schools and universities (Hingley 2021). The Soviet history of secret police knocking on the doors of critics is also common knowledge. Allegedly, Putin is in a habit of ruling with an iron fist and poisoning those whom he perceives to be a threat. It is not Putin that introduced autocracy in ruling the Russian state; it is rather the entrenched autocracy in the history of the Russian state that introduced Putin.

Looking back, during and after the fall of the Soviet Union, a plethora of adversaries attempted to establish new political and economic empires by seizing control of the government's assets. The greatest controversy in recent Russian history was related to privatization in Boris Yeltsin's era, specifically the atrocious *"loans for shares"* deal in which some of the best assets of the Russian economy were marketed at apparently favorable prices to a small group of well-connected oligarchs (Treisman 2010, 207). The vast bulk of these transactions involved substantial raw material wealth that became the foundation of some of Russia's biggest corporations. Mikhail Khodorkovsky seized control of the Yukos oil company; Boris Berezovsky procured ownership of the Sibneft oil company; and Vladimir Potanin acquired the nickel and palladium giant, Norilsk Nickel.

In hindsight, some have argued that although the method of privatization was corrupt, these firms performed quite well and

contributed to subsequent economic growth (Shinar 2015). However, these experiments with the economy brought to light the Russian oligarchs as they established their influence in politics. Putin was fast-tracked into the President's office by a group of pro-Western oligarchs connected to Boris Yeltsin. They, like one of Putin's allies, the multibillionaire Boris Berezovsky, regarded the reintegration of Primakov (presidential candidate) as too expensive and against Russia's economic interests. The 'spy' after coming to power made an agreement with the oligarchs that they must not interfere in government policies, or he will undo the deal that made them rich (Goldman 2004). Those who turned a deaf ear to his advice faced consequences; some were sent to jails while others were exiled. Those who continued to follow the presidential directions blindly gained influence in the decision-making spheres, and their fortunes have multiplied many folds to this day. The expensive gifts Putin received from the oligarchs (including a £500m super yacht) tend to strengthen the claim that the oligarchs are the real architects of Russia's foreign policy adventurism (Stewart 2022).

Russian Exceptionalism

The Russian and American cultures are distinguished by a firmly established idea of distinctiveness and superiority, which influences their attitudes to national security. This feeling of *missionist exceptionalism* informs people of their unique status in the world and their essential roles to perform (Humphreys 2016). The concept of Puritanism and the puritan work ethics were vital ingredients of nascent American democracy, particularly in contrast to the hierarchical European Catholicism of that time. Parallels to American exceptionalism exist in the Russian context where Russia is portrayed as a unique land of Christian Orthodoxy and the European kings. It is pertinent to note that exceptional orthodox spirituality and state security are entangled (Payne 2010). Russian orthodox religious principles and the discourse of Russian exceptional values about the common good serve as the nation's spiritual glue. Putin highlighted these values in his annual speech to the Federal Assembly in 2012, bemoaning that these qualities were

not more prevalent: *'charity, empathy, compassion, cooperation, and mutual assistance'* (Putin 2012, 48).

In contrast to the American culture, Russian ideals take the whole society into account. The state is "holy and unbreakable" and "its grandeur and interests surpass those of any one person" (YouTube video, 2016, 0.28:5.15). This also stems from a historical conviction in the primacy of a community and social lifestyle above the competitive individualism of more industrialized European nations. According to this perspective, Russia is almost the personification of cosmic virtue; it is tolerant, compassionate, and sometimes naive. Cosmic evil betrays and harms it systematically (Hovorun 2022). In accordance with this mainstream discourse that shapes, the Russian identity, contacts between western governments are considered as corrupt and focused only on self-interest whereas Russia's relations are based on 'righteousness and benevolence'.

Even in the Soviet past, parallels existed in the form of communism which could overshadow the universal claims of democracy (Rooksby 2012). During communism, this notion of imperial uniqueness was carried down through generations. Years of Soviet ideology fostered the belief that the Russian experience has a universal significance. Witnessing this persistent dilemma, Winston Churchill said in 1939, "Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma" (Mosbey 2015, 2).

Although the dark matter of Russian exceptionalism is unchangeable, the superficial side of it has been dynamic. It evolved with time, from a military to an economic power; from an atomic power to a superpower; and finally from a regular to a deceived and cheated naïve state with good intentions. From being inhabitants of the largest country, spanning eleven time zones, to a nation that sent the first man to space, Russians have always taken pride in their exceptional ways of life. Vladimir Putin repeatedly cites Russia's distinct history to support this perspective. While he has criticized American exceptionalism, he often extols a form of Russian exceptionalism (Hill 2015). In 2018, during the annual press conference, Putin is reported

to have said that Russia is on its way to becoming "self-sufficient" (Berls 2021, 1).

Interestingly, Russian elites have, since antiquity, propagated the conception of a distinct and divinely inspired civilization that is neither Eastern nor Western. Russia was the "Third Rome" and the Byzantine Empire's successor. St. Basil's Cathedral, located in Moscow's Red Square, was built on the orders of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century, and it is perhaps the most iconic emblem of an imperial and sacred Russia. Philotheus, an influential monk in the 16th century famously wrote, "*Two Romes fell, a third stands, and there will not be a fourth one*" (Yegorov 2017, 1). According to this belief, the two Romes were punished by God for an alliance with the unholy West. Alexander- II (1855-81) instrumented this idea to unite the Slavic population (Stremooukhoff 1953). The writings of Alexander Dugin resurrected this third Rome discourse, and its traces can be found in Putin's rhetoric and justification of the war in Ukraine. While addressing the Russian people during the ongoing invasion, Putin claimed that Ukraine had planned to take back Crimea under the protection of NATO, therefore, preemption was a better option ("Ukraine's Goal", 2021). Additionally, Putin has asserted that ethnic Russians have been victims of genocide in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas region, where Ukrainian military forces have been engaged in combat with Moscow-backed insurgents since 2014 (Vlamis 2022).

Flirting with the West

A quick overview of the Russian history shows the longstanding debate about whether Russia should be part of the East or the West. It is telling that it was as a result of the hostilities between the Greek and Persian Empires in the fifth century that the East/West argument originated (Pagden 2007). Persia was recognized as Asian whereas Greek was considered European. This was perceived as a conflict between Christianity and Paganism, following the emergence of Christianity (Alonso-Núñez, 1979). Russia has historically aligned itself with neither the East nor the West, but the notion

that it is a Eurasian nation has persisted and even reemerged in various periods. In the 18th century, cutting-edge European perspectives on advancement exerted a substantial influence on the Russian society, posing a novel inquiry: should Russia align with the East or the West in terms of its cultural and political orientation? (Çiçek 2015) In the eighteenth century, the solution was unambiguous (Marker 2009). Since the era of Peter, the Great, whose methodology was succinctly described as "opening vista onto Europe," the prosperity and expansion of the nation have been inextricably linked to the developed nations of the West (Lukin 2003, 2).

The ideas of French philosophers were held in high esteem during this era. Interestingly, as Russia was emerging as a newcomer to Europe with an intense desire to assert its belonging, Russians began to exhibit a greater inclination towards the "West-East" dichotomy as compared to their French counterparts. Catherine the Great, in her instructions to the Legislative Commission, proclaimed Russia as a "*European power*," thus emphasizing its affiliation with the Western world (Lukin 2016, 8). Undoubtedly, the usage of the term "European" by the Empress was not limited to its geographic connotation. By accentuating the connection of her nation to the cultural and intellectual ethos of Europe, she aimed to showcase her governance, imbued with the sagacious principles of Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire and Diderot, and to posit her nation as a consequential component of a civilized and forward-thinking global community (Gorbatov 2006).

Later, during the reign of Nicholas-I (1825-1855), the unidirectional belief in material development became less fascinating. The proposed establishment of an Oriental academy at St. Petersburg in 1810 by the then educational minister and chief ideologist Count Sergey Uvarov, depicted the newly developed likeness towards the East. Nicholas-I (1825-1855) centered his policies on stopping Russia from acquiring European revolutionary tendencies. Conforming to the state ideology of the period, Russia was not a European nation but a separate type of culture, resistant to clashes

between various classes and states, and built on *orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationalism* (Kuzio 2022).

Likewise, initially, the new Marxist worldview was geared toward the West. Karl Marx posited that the proletarian revolution would transpire in the industrialized nations of Europe, which possessed favorable economic conditions. In order to validate the Russian Revolution, Lenin asserted that Russia represented a "weak link" in the capitalist system that had fractured first, precluding the imminent revolution in the West (Brinkley 1998, 151). Later, the hostility with the West created discursive othering between the Soviet Russia and the capitalist West. After the liquidation of the USSR, it was recognized that people were unwilling to live in isolation and, moreover, they were inspired by western values based on liberty. History informs that Russia has been a swinging state between the East and the West, and the stance taken by Russian leadership in the aforementioned discourse as well as their perception of Russia's strategic direction during any given timeframe, had a direct impact on the country's domestic and foreign policies (Donaldson and Nadkarni 2018).

Civilizational Identity and Expansionism

Insisting that Russia has become one of the primary participants in the new global power structure may be associated with its civilizational exceptionalism. The idea of an orthodox civilization requires correction since it presupposes that religion is the primary component in determining Russian culture. The idea of Compatriots reveals that the Russians' conception of civilization is far greater. Even those with positive perceptions toward Russia are regarded to be Russian compatriots (O'Loughlin, Toal and Kolosov 2016). Indeed, both the foreign policy adventurism under Putin and the war in Ukraine have deep civilizational roots (Diesen 2022). The picture of Grand prince of Kiev, Prince Yaroslav, the wise (1019-1054), on the one thousand Russian Rubble currency note and the Ukrainian two-hryvna currency note highlight deep civilizational ties of over a thousand years between Russia and Ukraine. Kiev is Jerusalem to the Russian civilization,

considering the long history of Slavs and the foundations of Kievan Rus after 880. On the matter of Ukraine being an integral part of the Russian Civilization, there is very little debate in the Russian society.

The New Year Address of Russian President Yeltsin in 1994 indicated his regard for Russian speaking people in the 'near abroad' when he referred to them as *Compatriots* which means people sharing a common fatherland (Kaya 2016). Putin approved the lyrics and tune of the old soviet style anthem while censoring mentions of Stalin, Lenin, communism, and the party. The phrase "Age-old union of fraternal peoples" has been substituted for "Firm bulwark of the friendship of peoples" in the new anthem (Valeria 2021, 5). The term "the fatherland" remained vibrant in all versions of the anthem. Kiev had been the capital of Rus orthodoxy for centuries and seeing the center of Russian civilization fall to the 'sinful west' is not tolerable for all those who believe in 'exceptional Russian civilization'. Russian history makes it evident that Kiev has fallen so many times into the hands of 'others'. After the conquest of Kiev by Tatar Yoke (1219-1241), Lithuania (1240-1462), and Polish and Swedish armies in the seventeenth century, Slavs recovered their 'Jerusalem' and expanded their empire multiple times: "*Russia without Ukraine is certainly a very different Russia"* (Trenin 2002, 18).

Russia has long feared losing its power in what it has considered its legitimate sphere of influence in the 'near abroad'. Putin has often expressed unhappiness with NATO's eastward expansion. The Russian elites have constantly revoked the right of self-determination of Ukrainians while claiming Ukraine as part of the Rus orthodoxy. Putin, through his recent article opined his conviction about Ukrainian and the Russian people not mere "blood relatives" but almost the same (Putin 2021, 87). Even the pro-west Russian opposition has denied a separate identity to the Ukrainian people (Dickinson 2021). This discourse on civilization has given the Russian elites more confidence to pursue an expansionist foreign policy against its historic fatherlands, and, therefore, it serves as a power base in the Russian foreign policy.

Henry Kissinger described the pattern of Russian leadership from Peter the Great to Vladimir Putin as one that has remained remarkably consistent, despite changing circumstances over time (Kissinger 2015). Putin is more akin to Nicholas-I even though he claims to be Peter the Great because both Putin and Nicholas-I were initially proponents of the West before becoming hostile to it. Both received education in public finance, jurisprudence, constitutional law, political economy, and government. Both aided allies in putting down revolutions. Poland's revolt (1830–1831) was brutally euthanized by Nicholas-I, who also invalidated the Polish constitution as well as its autonomy (Encyclopedia Britannica 2010). He also assisted Austria in crushing the Hungarian Revolution in 1849 (Roberts, 1991). During his last decade, Nicholas governed as a stubbornly regressive, anti-Enlightenment, and anti-Western despot.

Nicholas-I (1825-1855) is not the only monarch who is an inspiration for Putin. Alexander-III who ruled Russia from 1881-94 halted the reforms that his father Alexander- II (1855-1881) had initiated after the defeat in Crimea and transformed Russia into a police state full of spies and informers. After Russia's catastrophic Crimean War defeat in 1856, domestic pressure for reform intensified. Tsar Alexander-II (1855-1851) freed the serfs in 1861 and founded local legislative councils and restructured the court to provide a small section of the populace a say in politics like Yeltsin did, but Putin like Alexander-III (1881-1894) rolled back the reforms of his predecessor, thus transforming Russia into a police state.

While Putin publicly shows his dissent to the communist rule, yet he harbors deep feelings for dictators like Stalin, as evidenced by his claim that *"if Stalin had access to a nuclear weapon during the Second World War, he would not have used it to murder large numbers of civilians"*. On the other hand, Putin criticizes the United States by asserting that *"it carried out the attack to demonstrate its power and demand to be taken seriously"* (YouTube video, 2016, 0.28:5.15). The Soviet state and its leaders have used information and ideology as weapons since the very beginning for their fight for survival at home and

to expand their influence abroad. The communist regime used political falsification as a crucial instrument for populace control.

The Bolsheviks believed that propaganda and information were crucial for public support. Vladimir Lenin, the architect of the Soviet Union, acknowledged the power of ideas as a tool for both motivating and governing the masses. The Bolsheviks resorted to the then-unique but now-familiar tactics, including flyers, banners, mass demonstrations, news slanting, and cynical exploitation of the artistic and literary sectors. The communists were able to impose their ideology by using these methods together with violence. This all seemed to have inspired Putin after his first term as President when he called the collapse of the Soviet Empire the "biggest catastrophe of the 20th century" (Sugandh 2017, 8). Putinism is not a recent phenomenon but has parallels in Russian history where if one step was taken towards the West, it was followed by two steps back.

One may also observe this attitude in Putin's orientation towards the West. In 2007, *Time Magazine* flaunted a vibrant picture of Putin on its cover with the caption, *"Person of the Year"* (Ignatius 2007). Putin also rejected any notion of a 'Russian concept' or a unique civilizational endeavor separated from the Western model. In 2002, in reply to a question from the dissident Adam Michnik regarding Putin's vision of Russia's historical role and subsequent expansionist ambitions, the President vividly affirmed: "The economic growth of the massive territories that find themselves under the influence of the Russian Federation is a joint task with Europe and other civilizations," within the context of a "natural integration into political, economic, and defensive structures among civilized co-existing entities" (Eltchaninoff 2018, 34). When inquired if Russia has been tilting towards Europe or Asia, he responded: "a *geographical standpoint, Russia is, of course, a Eurasian nation. However, Russia is without a doubt a European because it is a country of European culture* (Putin 2002). However, there is a huge contradiction between his conduct before and after his historic Munich address in 2007 where he

bashed the US for overstepping its borders in all spheres (Putin 2014).

Revisionist Russia and the World Order

American leaders think they are improving the world when they work for global civil liberties; assist nations in establishing democracies; or speak out for marginalized populations. However, the Russian public and government authorities have a very negative view of Washington's aspirations. They contend that the real motive of the West is not to 'export democracy' but military intervention in the political and economic matters of a nation (Coyne 2008). Putin was very concerned that the US will ultimately intrude into Russia via its role in the hostilities in Kosovo, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya as well as the Arab Spring rebellion (Koffler 2022).

The fear of the West has been deeply woven into the social and political fabric of Russia. Fyodr Tyutchev, a Slavophile and poet of the nineteenth century attributed this distrust to the west, especially their self-seeking nature. According to his viewpoint, there can be no partnership between Russia and the West, whether based on shared interests or principles. In his opinion, every Western interest or trend is aimed at undermining Russia, particularly its future, and seeks to cause harm to Russia. Therefore, Russia's sole viable approach towards the West should be to foster its disunity and fragmentation, rather than attempting to forge an alignment. This would compel the West to cease their hostility towards Russia, not out of conviction, but rather due to their helplessness (Bennett 2015).

Halford Mackinder, a British geographer and statesman gave his theory of 'Heartland' in 1904 that noted that whoever controls Eurasia, controls the rest of the world. Research on his work over the past two decades made Russian people skeptical of the intentions of the West towards Eurasia (Bassin and Aksenov 2006). George F. Kennan famously penned a "Long Telegram" in February 1946. He argued that "Kremlin's neurotic view of world affairs" is rooted in a "traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity," which originally

stemmed from the belief that Russians are "peaceful agricultural people trying to live on vast exposed plain in neighborhood of fierce nomadic peoples" *(*Kennan 1946, 5).

Indeed, the Cold War mentality lingers on. During that time, both the United States and Russia maintained nuclear arsenals on standby in case either side launched an attack, thereby guaranteeing Mutually Assured Destruction. This dynamic was characterized by mutual distrust, hostility, and terror. Following a botched CIA attempt to topple the Castro dictatorship, the Soviet Union deployed nuclear weapons in Cuba during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 to thwart a possible American invasion (Scott 2009). This mistrust has its roots in the American Grand Strategy of stopping the USSR from controlling Eurasia. Declassified documents from Reagan's presidency bring to light these US endeavors intended to prevent Russia from growing its influence.

Historically, the fall of the Soviet Union provided a firm base to support anti-Americanism of the future (Katzenstein and Keohane 2007). Currently, the political and military elite of Russia think that America aims to undermine Putin's administration and, in the long run, decapitate Russia to rule Eurasia. At a conference organized by the Ministry of Defense in 2014, Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu, Chief of the General Staff Valerii Gerasimov, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff, Vladimir Zarudniskyi and others shared this feeling that the new Western strategy for waging war on Russia is through "color revolutions" (Bartles 2016, 31).

Similarly, the eastward expansion of NATO is seen as a potential threat by Putin as he mentioned in his address to the Russian people after launching the offensive, "not an inch to the east, we were told in 1990" (Aljazeera 2022, 9). This skepticism towards Europe is also entrenched in the military history of Russia. both Napoleon in the 19th century and Hitler in the 20th century exploited the vast unprotected northern planes. More than geography, this belief in exceptional Russian values also boosts Euroscepticism. Seeing Russia as an

embodiment of cosmic good, convinces the ruling elite to perceive the West as morally sinful and corrupt.

The West, according to the above worldview cannot be trusted by Russians because its fundamental character is untrustworthy (Hovorun 2022). In this dichotomous depiction, Ukraine is trapped between good and evil. Ukraine contains many positive qualities, but they are imprisoned by the West's imposition of evil. It appears that Putin seeks to free the positive aspects of Ukraine by consuming it altogether. This is especially true since, in their perspective, Russia is a besieged fortress, which the West and the United States are seeking to destroy frequently, in collaboration with disloyal Russian people. The drive to control others is fueled by a fundamental mistrust of spontaneity and uncontrolled conduct; furthermore, they believe that since people are typically weak, if we do not dominate them, others will (Taylor 2018).

Thus, civilizational exceptionalism, autocracy, oligarchy, anti-Americanism, and Euroscepticism have always been part of the Russian culture. However, what restricted Russian expansionism after the fall of the Soviet Union was its weak economic position and the dominance of the West over the rest. The increased material strength of Russia coupled with the rise of China and the changing world order provided favorable conditions for Russia to expand its foreign policy towards the 'near abroad' as well as what Russia considered its legitimate sphere of influence.

After losing its production forces in times of revolution (1917 and 1990), Russia's production capability declined temporarily (Calvo and Reinhart 2000). The liberalization of the economy and the shock therapy created market uncertainty and the Yeltsin era could not prove healthy for the economy. However, with Putin's accession to power, oil prices soared, as did Russia's material might. During the time of Yeltsin, the average price of a barrel of crude oil was 18 dollars; however, between 2000 and 2016, a barrel of crude oil cost 65 dollars. The GDP and GNP graphs, which declined from 1990 onwards, began to rise in 1999 and reached a historic peak in 2007-08 and again in

2014. The gross domestic product increased from $200 billion in 1999 to $1.26 trillion in 2007. Russia rose from the 20th largest economy in the world to the 7th largest. The World Bank estimates that in 2007, Russia's per capita Gross National Income climbed from $5,780 in 2006 to $823 billion (Rutland 2008).

Long ago, political pundits prophesied that the rise of China's economy and deepening friendship between Russia and China might undermine the international order. Putin's displeasure with the US-dominated Global Order made headlines in 2007 when he addressed the world in Munich, "The United States has overstepped its borders in all spheres. It is imposing its will on other states in the economy, in politics and in the humanitarian sphere. And who likes this? Who likes it?" (Putin 2007, 19). The seeds of displeasure with the West were sown at the end of the Cold War. In its unclassified National Security Strategy 2017, the Trump administration accused Russia of being a revisionist power attempting to alter its standing in the international community, destabilizing the Eurasian region (including Georgia and Ukraine), and thereby increasing the likelihood of armed conflict in Europe (Encina 2018). For a revisionist power like Russia, it was difficult to accept that they no longer had a natural right to dominate their neighborhood and exercise influence beyond their borders (Glanville 2012).

Since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict, Putin has vigorously cultivated relations with China to counterbalance Russia's deteriorating links with Europe and the United States that the western media including a popular magazine called as best friendship ever (Editors 2019). Due to Russia's annexation of Crimea, Western leaders avoided the traditional May 9 World War II Victory Day ceremony in Moscow in 2015. President Xi was one of the few leaders who attended the event. Later in the same year, China also invited Putin to Beijing to witness a Chinese celebration marking 70 years of the end of WWII in Asia (Guardian Staff Reporter 2015).

> Russian-Chinese ties have now probably reached a peak in their entire history and continue developing. The partnership between Russia and China is based on

> sincere friendship and sympathy between our peoples, on deep respect and trust, consideration for each other's key interests, and commitment to make our countries flourish (Putin 2015).

President Xi also called Putin a great World leader and his most intimate and best friend which made headlines in the West because this alliance was perceived as a threat to global peace. Strong relations between the two leaders exist because of their common goals of undermining an international order dominated by the United States; preserving domestic stability; and averting "color revolutions" at home. Putin and Xi share the belief that their nations were treated unfairly in the past. Therefore, they have been contemptuous of the present international political and economic order dominated by the West (Editors 2019). Russia during the decade and a half after the fall of communism was not furious but concentrated on its strengths which shaped Putinism.

Resurrection of "the Great Russia" Discourse

Apart from the material resurgence of Russia, Putin has resurrected the ideational discourse of the "great exceptional Russia" through different mechanisms including his rhetoric in the state media. Putin asserted: "there is every reason to believe that the famed containment policy of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twenty-first centuries survives now" (Hill 2015, 42-61). According to this discourse, the West continually attempts to force Russia into a corner due to its independent stance and lack of hypocrisy. According to Vladimir Putin's televised address regarding Ukraine, there are limits to everything and with Ukraine, the West has gone over the line, acting recklessly and unprofessionally (Bloomberg 2022).

The desire for a position in international affairs equivalent to Russia's might, coupled with the assumption that the country possessed a distinct culture that may become universal, led to the developing perception that other nations were out to eradicate this Russian particularity. Putin was not even really enticed by cultural globalization. "I would not like my country, Russia, to lose its uniqueness and identity" said Putin which

signifies his possessiveness towards the Russian ways and reinforce the “stab in the back” story (Kotkin 2016, 6). The neo-Eurasian prophet Alexander Dugin has also played a role in resurrecting the great Russia discourse. His writings have inspired many in Russia including the ruling elite.

Moreover, Russian thinktanks have been very active in dispensing ideas that have shaped Russian foreign policy since 2007. The Russian Center for Strategic Assessments and Forecasts, and the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies are thinktanks whose assessment mirrors the perspective of the Russian government officials regarding geopolitics. Reports from these institutes which shape Russian Foreign Policy claim that the past 20 years of U.S. foreign policy confirms the Mackinder and Spykman theories underlying these policies (Koffler 2021, 90). U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Libya, and Syria, as well as the situation in Ukraine are identified as examples of the US geopolitical strategies. Ideas are propagated cynically that the actual strategic objective of the U.S. military involvement in these nations has been to achieve regional supremacy; secure resource control; and generate corporate possibilities (Berryman 2012).

In May 2014, another Russian thinktank whose research supports Putin's judgment, produced a report *titled* "Issues of Russia's Security in the Context of the Mackinder Concept." This assessment characterized Mackinder's *"Heartland"* idea as having an "anti-Russian geopolitical outlook" (Rebekah 2021, 89). Russia’s invasion of Crimea was supported by citing "extraordinary Western pressure on Ukraine" as an impetus for the move. To ensure the safety of Russia, all such reports emphasize the significance of "studying Western geopolitical conceptions and formulating our own solutions to them" (Rebakah 2021, 89). Olga Vasilyeva, The Russian Minister of Education and Science, concurs with President Putin's aim as expressed at a youth forum in 2016: "Building a better future is impossible without a solid foundation, and that foundation is patriotism; anything else is unimaginable" (Plotnikova 2016, 4).

An analysis of Russian textbooks also enlightens us about the revival of Putinism. These materials even defend Stalin's genocides, including the Holodomor, the deliberate starvation of between 2.5 to 7.5 million Ukrainian peasants from 1932 to 1933 (Applebaum 2017). In June 2007, Putin declared at the National Conference of Humanities and Social Sciences that he had instructed the creation of new history textbooks approved by the Kremlin, with the purpose of "making our citizens, particularly the youth, proud of their nation" (Langdon and Tismaneanu 2020, 153). These bits of Russian discourse teach pupils at a very young age that their country is nearly infallible and so is Vladimir Putin. The new history textbooks convince pupils of the necessity of having strong leadership thus, tying the fall of the Soviet Union with a Koffler, Rebekah. Thus, the resurgence of the "Great Russia Discourse" is coupled with a rise in Foreign Policy adventurism and autocracy. Therefore, the war in Ukraine is a totally different story on and off the TV (Vetsko and Sandro 2022).

2. Implications of the Ukraine War for the United States

Russian expansionism in Ukraine has serious consequences for the United States-led global economic, political, and cultural world order. On the economic front, the spillover of the Ukraine War affects commercial partners and neighboring countries in addition to the parties directly involved (Khudaykulova, Yuanqiong, and Khudaykulov 2022). According to projections by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Russia is expected to contribute 1.6 percent of global GDP in 2022 whereas Ukraine's economic output is anticipated to account for 0.2 percent of the global output. Despite the modest size of their respective economies relative to the global economy, both countries are significant in several critical sectors, including energy (particularly petroleum) and food. A larger drop in the global economy is happening than previously thought, with inflation at its highest levels in many years. The situation is made worse by the increasing cost of living, the worsening financial situation caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The global

growth rate is predicted to decrease from 6.0% in 2021 to 3.2% in 2022 and further to 2.7% in 2023, which represents the worst growth outlook since 2001, excluding the 2008 financial crisis and the harshest periods of the COVID-19 outbreak (IMF Report 2022). Commodity prices and stock markets are not alien to each other and the rising commodity prices have a negative impact on stock markets, particularly in the developing countries. Investors fear losing money which stops them from investing in the emerging economies. The United States might experience a loss of confidence in the dollar which is used by default for international trading. International trade may turn towards local currencies, thus endangering the primacy of the dollar. If more sanctions are imposed, it will give impetus to the use of local currency which not only depletes the dollar but may also compromise the United States' political power.

The challenge for the United States is to obstruct Russia's revisionist goals while maintaining the possibility of future dialogue and cooperation. Although the United States is understandably not willing to go to war with Russia, it may do more to support Ukraine in fending off Russian aggression and reassure its European allies of its security commitments. In a changing world order, each nation has a unique history and is exceptional in its own ways. No universal interpretation of 'western exceptionalism' is possible. The United States needs to exercise caution in employing certain mechanisms to suppress or deny Russian exceptionalism. This denial or rejection of identity may amount to a stern reaction where Russia may act as an empire. With a historical sense of insecurity, the United States-led western responses may perpetuate the Russian sense of insecurity that may accelerate a shift to multipolarity in the political world order.

Furthermore, the increasing relevance of China, India, and Russia has impacted the sphere of the West's political influence including that of the United States. An all-encompassing foreign policy approach is required to maintain the United States' influence across Africa, Middle East, Central, and Far East Asia. Traditionally, the United States prefers rationality in

its foreign policy; thus, it must not let national emotions hinder the reconciliation process. Keeping in mind the interconnectedness across the globe, the world is not ready for more havoc. As argued in this paper, Russian ideas have shaped the way Russian leaders behave, especially when they are fearful of losing Russian control. Russia's influence in what it calls its 'near abroad' and its historical leadership role in Eurasia should not be challenged. Russia along with China should be guaranteed a relevant position in the international order and not of a mere factory or gas station with a standing army.

Conclusion

This brief survey of Russian foreign policy over a period of 200 years helps to offer an overview of the dynamics of continuity and change in the country's external behavior. From the Imperial to the Soviet and the Post-Soviet Russia, Russian ideals have played a pivotal role in establishing real-world practices. It is evident from the country's history that the main driver of foreign policy remains ideational factors constituting the material world. The present study has highlighted the theme of ideology in relation to foreign policy to argue that identity discourse is not ephemeral in Russian foreign policy and that it has always been there as a domestic glue and power base in external adventures.

Putin and his precursors have reinforced the notion that Russia is *Derzhava* translated as "a great power", predestined for leadership in Eurasia. For example, as the official Moscow policy, Putin has promoted Russia's centuries-old special position and active role as a peacekeeper and a balancing element in the world civilization. In the historic Russian Czarist tradition of gathering the lands, Putin has recognized the creation of domination over the post-Soviet states and the "consolidation of the Russian diaspora" as a significant strategic aim under the heading "Eurasian integration" (Sencerman 2018, 45). He connected these goals to Russia's fundamental national interest in being a sovereign power in a multipolar world.

In the context of Russian expansion inside Ukraine, the United States-led Western order needs to respond with caution. Russia, inspired by its historical ideas of exceptionalism, is not ready to compromise on the question of its 'near abroad'. Russia will not back down from the invasion that Putin calls a "special operation to liberate Ukraine" (Osborn and Nikolskaya 2022). Putin's approval of the idea of the "Russian World" in recent foreign policy documents clearly depicts his intentions. For Russia to expand its influence, the global ascendance of China and India and their relations with Russia are ideal conditions. Putin will go to any limit to consolidate his idea of the Russian world at home and win the confidence of his compatriots in the 'near abroad'. Hence, Putin's idea of the 'Russian World' not only makes Putinism or the Putin Doctrine a part of Russian foreign policy for years to come but also marks a change in the world order. It will cast a shadow in world history no less than that of the Bush Doctrine which changed the world in many ways. In this changing world order, the United States' foreign policy must be accommodating to the Russian notion of exceptionalism and must not trigger its inherent sense of insecurity in order to contain the Ukraine crisis and its impacts on the world order.

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